



AAC Publications

Coffee Glacier, New Routes

Alaska, Central Alaska Range

On June 6, Daniel Barton and I landed at the 5,600' level of the northwest fork of the Coffee Glacier, and over the course of a week established new routes on both Coffee and Mocha spires. I had previously completed the first ascents of each formation, and it was exciting to return and climb some of the other lines I had been thinking about for so long.

I originally came across the spires in 1993 during a ski tour from the lower Coffee Glacier after a failed attempt on Broken Tooth. My subsequent climbs on the south faces of Coffee and Mocha spires in 2008 and 2009 (see AAJ 2009 and AAJ 2010) were both established after additional unsuccessful attempts on Broken Tooth.

After setting up camp, Dan and I skied 45 minutes to Coffee Spire. Photos from past trips showed an enticing series of cracks to the right of the 2008 line, and I was eager to give them a try. Under a cloudless, calm sky, we climbed six new pitches of solid and well-protected cracks to the prominent pyramid-shaped block overlooking the face. The line ascends into a golden-colored ramp-corner system capped by a large roof. At pitch four, we were able to exit the corner and then climb up and left on a black face crack at 5.10 A1. The climbing up to this point had been all free up to 5.10; however, this pitch involved pulling on gear in a few spots, but would probably go free at 5.11. The pitch ended on a slab, which then gave access to another corner ramp that took us up to the pyramid-shaped block.

From here our climb joined the 2008 route for six more pitches to the summit, and involved snow climbing, 4th-class scrambling, and a summit pitch of loose 5.8. The summit block of Coffee Spire is an exposed perch with amazing views of Broken Tooth and the numerous peaks of the Ruth Gorge. After 12 hours of enjoyable climbing, we rappelled 10 pitches down the 2008 route, installing new webbing at all the stations. We named the route Cappuccino Corners (2,000', 12 pitches, 5.10 A1).

Back at camp, we enjoyed two sunny days of rest while we were continually entertained by avalanches tearing down Broken Tooth. Over the course of eight hours, the massive summit dish completely emptied its contents down the 3,000' south face. In my nine trips to the Coffee Glacier, I have never witnessed such a spectacular avalanche event.

We then turned our attention to Coffee Spire's smaller neighbor, Mocha Spire. During the first ascent of Mocha Spire in 2009, Peter Haeussler and I had peered over the summit edge into a large right-facing corner that we had traversed under during our ascent. This unclimbed corner was to be our new objective.

After a sunny approach, Dan and I racked up at the base of the 2009 route and climbed the first pitch of loose 5.7 to a ledge with two corners leading up from it. The original route ascended the left corner, so this time we chose the right one. This pitch had some of the nicest rock I have seen in the Alaska Range, and had us both grinning ear to ear. From the top of the corner, the route moves up and left for two moderate pitches on the original route, leading to a belay at the start of a large right-facing corner. From here, three new pitches of varied crack and face climbing up to 5.9 led to the summit of Mocha Spire. At the top we joked about the perfect weather, only to get soaked on our last rappel by a rogue rainstorm. We established a new rappel line leading straight from the summit to the base in four long rappels. We named the route Mocha Direct (1,000', 7 pitches, 5.9).

– Jay Rowe

Images



The massive summit bowl of Broken Tooth empties its contents in a huge late-spring avalanche.



The south face of Coffee Spire, showing the first ascent line from 2008, as well as the new line Cappuccino Corners (2,000', 12 pitches, 5.10 A1), completed by Daniel Barton and Jay Rowe in 2020. This summit lies on the divide between the Coffee and Ruth glaciers.



The south face of Mocha Spire, showing the first ascent line from 2009 as well as the new variation, Mocha Direct (1,000', 7 pitches, 5.9), completed by Daniel Barton and Jay Rowe in 2020. This peak lies on the divide between the Coffee and Ruth glaciers.



Jay Rowe leading a clean golden dihedral on the fifth pitch of Mocha Direct (1,000', 7 pitches, 5.9) on Mocha Spire.



Jay Rowe leads the second pitch of Cappuccino Corners (2,000', 12 pitches, 5.10 A1) on Coffee Spire.

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